

Beatrice Rana

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 9.20pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

Alexander Scriabin Fantasie in B minor

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco *Cipressi*

Claude Debussy *Prélude* Book 2 No 7, *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune*

Prélude Book 1 No 7, *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*

L'isle joyeuse

Franz Liszt Piano Sonata in B minor

Beatrice Rana brings characteristic imaginative flair to her recital tonight, with a programme that takes us from Liszt's great sonata into the early 20th century and the contrasting sound worlds of Scriabin, Debussy and Castelnuovo-Tedesco.

For her Barbican recital debut, Italian pianist Beatrice Rana presents a programme of dazzling and demanding music that offers a kaleidoscopic range of colours and styles.

Two fantasies, quite different in scale though sharing the same key, bookend this contrasting programme: Scriabin's *Fantasie* in B minor, Op 28 and Liszt's B minor Sonata – a fantasy in all but name. Between these two works, Beatrice Rana whisks us away to Romantic landscapes, moonlit evenings and enchanted islands in deeply evocative and atmospheric music by Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Debussy.

Scriabin's *Fantasie* captures the essence of the composer's melding of late-Romantic and early-Impressionistic styles. Written in 1900, this one-movement work explores new harmonic and expressive possibilities, and spans a spectrum of emotions, from introspective melancholy to passionate fervour. A lyrical opening melody serves as the foundation for the piece. As it unfolds, chromatic harmonies and intricate key changes create a sense of continuous transformation and uncertainty of direction, contributing to the *Fantasie*'s dreamlike quality, drawing the listener into a world in which conventional tonal boundaries are stretched and redefined. Virtuoso elements – sparkling runs and arpeggios – are interwoven with moments of contemplative introspection, offering the listener a heightened emotional experience.

From the expressive contrasts of Scriabin, we are transported to the serene landscapes of Tuscany in Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Cipressi* (1920), an evocative, rarely performed piece whose delicate textures and melodies suggest the graceful sway of cypress trees, in this instance those at the Villa Forti in Usigliano, where the composer spent many of his summers.

The piece opens with a tranquil melody, rich in Italianate lyricism yet with hints of Debussy and Liszt, tinged with a Spanish poignancy in its haunting, folk-like melody. It gradually builds in intensity, painting a vivid musical picture of the Tuscan landscape's changing colours and scents.

Debussy takes us to an even more exotic setting in his *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune*, from Book 2 of his *Préludes*, the inspiration for which was an article in the newspaper *Le temps* in December 1912; this described the durbar at which King George V was crowned Emperor of India. Its opening evokes the first notes of *Clair de lune* (from Debussy's *Suite bergamasque*); what follows is an enchantingly atmospheric nocturne replete with sensuous harmonies and shimmering textures.

The western wind then rolls in with *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* (What the West Wind Saw), in its wake revealing secrets and untold stories. The title comes from a story by Hans Christian Andersen, but the inspiration could equally be Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, which Debussy had read in translation.

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The wind's gusty, swirling fury is dramatically portrayed with powerful chords in the lower register of the piano, sweeping arpeggios, bold harmonies and surprisingly dense textures. The piece culminates in a thunderous climax, in which the full force of the wind is unleashed, before dying back into a haunting, lingering quietude.

A painting by Watteau, *L'embarquement pour Cythère*, was the inspiration for Debussy's *L'isle joyeuse* (1904), although another isle, the island of Jersey, is also implicated in the title. It was here that Debussy revised the piece while on holiday with Emma Bardac, who became his second wife. Whatever the geographical setting, Debussy invites us to an idyllic island, one in which the sun shines brightly and laughter fills the air. The piece is characterised by its virtuoso, playful piano writing, with cascading arpeggios and brilliant trills that evoke sparkling waves and joyous festivities and surely owe a debt to Liszt.

Beatrice Rana turns to Liszt himself for the final piece: his B minor Piano Sonata, which was written between 1842 and 1853 and is regarded by many as his ultimate masterpiece. It now holds an unassailable place alongside other greats in the pantheon of piano repertoire, but over the decades it has provoked extreme reactions, from admiration to suspicion and envy. The critic Eduard Hanslick declared, 'Anyone who has heard this and finds it beautiful is beyond help', while Wagner heaped praise upon it; more recently, Alfred Brendel has called it 'the most original, powerful and intelligent sonata composed after Beethoven and Schubert'.

With its innovative single-movement structure, it is a monumental masterpiece that pushes the boundaries of form and expression. Its structure references both the Classical sonata form as conceived by Haydn and Mozart and continued by Beethoven and Schubert, and the looser term 'sonata', meaning an instrumental work usually in four movements. Liszt combines these meanings to create a single movement in which the sections of the work are linked via distinctive themes or motifs, as in a fantasy.

Thematic transformation, intricate counterpoint, recurring motifs and a rich harmonic palette create a narrative that unfolds like a dramatic journey, from the mysterious and brooding opening through an energetic operatic-like dialogue to a deeply expressive slow movement which forms the centrepiece of the sonata. The recapitulation follows, its driving, dissonant fugato building to a grand climax. The final moments reprise the mystery of the opening and the work ends in a mood of quiet optimism in the major key.

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Performers

Beatrice Rana piano

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